



Washington State Department of Agriculture News Release

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Census reveals shifts in Washington Agriculture

Olympia – Agriculture remains a major economic force in Washington according to figures released this week by the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

The 2002 Agricultural Census shows statewide that the market value of Washington's agricultural goods rose 8 percent between 1997 and 2002 to \$5.3 billion. While the number of farms decreased from 40,000 to 36,000, the number of acres devoted to farming has remained relatively stable at 15.3 million acres.

The census, conducted by the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) every five years shows the changes in the nation's agricultural landscape. The census is detailed down to the county level of every state and containing information ranging from the acreage and value of crops to demographic information on farm operators.

"The census shows the continued importance of agriculture as an economic force in every county in Washington," said Valoria Loveland, director for the Washington State Department of Agriculture. "All farms, both large and small, continue to create business opportunities that have been heightened by our efforts to open more markets both regionally and abroad."

The census data shows:

- Direct market sales from farms more than doubled from \$16 million in 1997 to \$35 million in 2002.
- Apple acreage has decreased, although the market value of apples has remained steady. This was attributed to new apple tree plantings that are producing higher proportions of fruit suitable for the fresh market rather than the lower quality fruit used in food processing.
- Acreage devoted to wine grapes and sweet cherries has shown a substantial increase.
- The state's livestock base is becoming more diverse with substantial increases in the number of farms raising specialty livestock such as llamas and goats.
- Dairy production is moving steadily from the western to eastern Washington.

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- Mint, hops and asparagus acreage has declined substantially while there has been an increase in sweet corn production. Grant County is the top county for sweet corn production in Washington and in the nation.
- The top three counties for agricultural sales are Grant, Yakima and Benton.
- The majority of farms in the state, 59 percent, sell less than \$10,000 in agricultural products. Six percent of the state's farms receive 73 percent of the overall revenue in terms of sales and government payments.
- Every county in the state has some significant agricultural activity. Western Washington leaders include Whatcom County for berry production and Lewis County for chicken production.
- Washington outpaces the national average for the number of women-owned and operated farms.

According to the NASS definition, a farm is defined as any place where at least \$1,000 worth of agricultural goods were produced and sold during the reference year.

NASS used a different methodology in gathering data for this report. In the past, the service relied on gathering data from a historical list of farms. For the 2002 census, NASS conducted an independent, comprehensive geographical survey to locate farms that were not on previous census lists.

A brochure, "Quick Facts on Washington from the 2002 Census of Agriculture" is available on the Web at <http://www.nass.usda.gov/wa/>. The full 383-page report is available at <http://www.nass.usda.gov/census/census02/volume1/wa/wa1intro.pdf>.

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